# Impact of the Handloom and Handicrafts Industry on Women Entrepreneurs in East Khasi Hills and Ri-Bhoi Districts of Meghalaya.

Synopsis of the Research Proposal

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**Ph.D. Program (Part-Time) in Management**

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## Abstract

The Indian handloom and handicrafts industry has always been a major means of earning a living, especially for the women who have been the cornerstones of the ancient weaving and craft-based industries. Women are considered to be dominant in sustaining and nurturing these industries in Meghalaya, particularly in the East Khasi hills district and Ri-bhoi district, because of their skills, creativity, and cultural knowledge. This research aims to find out the impact of the handloom and handicrafts industry and its effects on women entrepreneurs in the area. With the women entrepreneurs as the main target of the research, the two-fold aspects of the industry emerge, as an employer and the arena of economic empowerment of women. The study addresses how women's engagement in handloom and handicrafts contributes not only to their household income but also to community development, cultural preservation, and social empowerment. Despite the sector's potential, challenges such as inadequate market linkages, limited access to credit, lack of modern technology and policy constraints often hinder women's entrepreneurial growth. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study combines both primary data (through surveys and interviews with women entrepreneurs) and secondary data (from government reports, journals, and policy documents) to assess employment trends, entrepreneurial challenges, and opportunities in the sector. Findings from this study will provide insights for policymakers, NGOs, and self-help groups to design targeted interventions for strengthening women's participation and entrepreneurship in handloom and handicrafts. Ultimately, this research aims to reinforce the argument that strengthening the handloom and handicrafts sector in East Khasi Hills and Ri-bhoi can contribute significantly to employment generation, women's empowerment, and sustainable rural development in Meghalaya.



Keywords*: Handloom and Handicrafts Industry, Women Entrepreneurs, Employment Potentiality, Women Empowerment, East Khasi Hills District, Ri-bhoi district, Meghalaya, Rural Development.*

# Introduction

The role of women in the economic development of societies has long been recognized as pivotal. Women entrepreneurship has become an employment creation engine, diversification of income and social change agent the world over. The handloom and handicrafts industry has a special place in India since it not only gives people a chance to earn money but also maintains the numerous cultural traditions. Having over 43 lakh allied workers and weavers in the country, most of them being women, the handloom and handicrafts industry are considered to be the 2nd-largest source of rural employment after the agricultural industry.

Meghalaya is a state in north east part of India that is generally recognized as having an interesting cultural identity, craftsmanship and weaving. The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes possess unique craft traditions that are greatly ingrained in their social and cultural life. In these societies, women are customarily the preservers of weaving and handicraft. They practice weaving of textiles such as Ryndia (Erisilk), cane and bamboo work, and bead work, among other indigenous art. Weaving and handicrafts, especially in the East Khasi Hills and Ri-bhoi districts, are cultural practices as well as a livelihood.

Women's involvement in the handloom and handicrafts industry in Meghalaya is significant, as it helps them to earn a self-employment, supplement food production, and increase the family's responsiveness to economic risks. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs in this sector usually work either within the household or in small cooperatives, and it is easy to balance between domestic duties and economic activities. Women play one of the key roles in family and economic decision-making in a matrilineal society like the Khasi; this further enhances their involvement in entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, the labour market capabilities of this industry are not exhausted. The challenges that women entrepreneurs have to overcome include the inability to have access to modern tools, ineffective infrastructure, insufficient exposure to the market, the presence of machine-made alternatives, and the lack of support at the institutional level. These obstacles limit their expansion in production, designs, and expansion to broader markets. In addition, the younger generations are also leaving behind the traditional crafts because of the notion that they offer low and insecure income.

Under such conditions, the current research paper tries to assess the degree of employment potential of employment of handicrafts and handloom sector in Meghalaya, especially for the women entrepreneurs in East Khasi Hills and Ri-bhoi districts. It will examine the effects of the sector on the welfare of female households, economic empowerment, as well as community development. This paper also discusses the issues that women encounter in their business lives and what can be done to empower their presence in this sector.

The results are likely to be of great help to the policy discourse on the creation of job opportunities, women's empowerment, and rural development in the Northeast. This study also aims to illuminate the possibilities of the indigenous industries to maintain the livelihoods, culture, and inclusive developments in the marginalized areas.

# Literature Review

Handloom and handicrafts is a cultural and economic jewel in India. As it is stated by the Ministry of Textiles (2020), more than 43 lakh weavers and other workers are engaged in this field, and women make approximately 70% of the labour force. The variety of products represents one of the Indian handloom industries: it works with silk, cotton, wool, and mixed fabrics that serve the needs of the local population and have high export potential (Sinha, 2018).

More than 7 million artisans are employed in the handicrafts sector, which includes embroidery, woodcraft, metalwork, pottery, bamboo, and cane products (National Handicrafts Development Programme, 2019). The industry is labour-intensive, environmentally friendly, and in many cases, based at home, therefore giving flexible working conditions to the female population, particularly in rural communities.

The entrepreneurial habit of women in handloom and handicrafts business is dependent on their culture, imagination, and the need for additional revenue. Research by Bhattacharjee (2016) highlights that women in Northeastern states are the ones who control weaving practices because they feel they are an inseparable aspect of their identity. The industry enables women to exploit traditional skills at the same time participating in income-generating activities.

Nevertheless, researchers also emphasize some issues that female entrepreneurs in this sector encounter. A study by Sharma and Jain (2019) indicates that women are not able to develop as entrepreneurs due to limited access to credit, poor technological infrastructure, and a lack of training. In addition, social factors like the level of domestic and business work limit women from growing businesses (Rani, 2020).

Woven goods and trade like bamboo and cane work, wood carving, and jewellery making are a very significant component of the cultural economy in Meghalaya. Eri silk (*Ryndia*) weaving, in contrast, has become widely known as it is a non-violent, eco-friendly silk manufacturing process. Research conducted by Mawlong (2017) revealed that weaving in Meghalaya is a mostly women-led activity, and the loom is usually a part of the domestic environment. It is known that women entrepreneurs have generations of women who transmit skills, generating continuity in cultural practices.

Nonetheless, the industry has failed to experience adequate market connectivity and organized mediums through which to market products both nationally and internationally. Reports from the North Eastern Council (2019) indicate that although handloom and Handicrafts have immense potential to contribute to Meghalaya's economy, they remain largely informal and underutilized.

Globally, craft-based industries are recognized as tools for inclusive and sustainable development. The International Labour Organization (2015) acknowledges that handicrafts provide employment to marginalized communities, especially women, by offering home-based and part-time work. In India, studies by Das (2018) argue that handloom and handicrafts can contribute significantly to rural employment if adequately supported by

policies, cooperatives, and market interventions.

The employment potential of the sector in Meghalaya is especially significant given the limited industrialization and dependency on agriculture. Women entrepreneurs have the capacity to create micro-enterprises, generate employment for others, and improve household income. Yet, lack of training in design innovation, absence of marketing skills, and insufficient access to financial resources continue to limit employment opportunities (Marak, 2021).

Bhowmik, S. K. In his work "Women and Handloom Industry in India, "focuses on women's role in the Indian handloom sector and how it impacts their social and economic empowerment.

Chakrabarty, P. in "Empowerment of Women through Handicrafts: A Case Study of Meghalaya, "analyzes how handicrafts empower women in the North east, including in Meghalaya, by providing income and preserving cultural heritage.

Das, S. In his study, "Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment in Northeast India," discusses the broader context of women entrepreneurship in North east India, having a focus on handicrafts and handloom industries.

Dutta, P. On "Sustainability and Women Entrepreneurship in Handloom and Handicrafts" Explores the sustainability obstacles encountered by female entrepreneurs in the handloom sector in Northeast India.

Singh, A. In his work "Micro finance and Women Empowerment in Handicrafts, "Focuses on significance of micro finance in enabling female entrepreneurs, especially in rural and remote areas like East Khasi Hills.

Baruah, B. On "Gender and Entrepreneurship: A Study of Women Entrepreneurs in the Handloom Sector of Assam and Meghalaya" Examines how gender dynamics affect entrepreneurial success in the handloom sector in Assam and Meghalaya.

Roy, R. In his paper, "The Role of NGOs in Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship in Rural Meghalaya, "evaluates how NGOs support women entrepreneurs in rural Meghalaya, focusing on handloom and handicrafts.

Sen, A., in "Gender and Development: A Study of Women Entrepreneurs in the Handicraft Industry, "Focuses on the gendered nature of entrepreneurship, with case studies from various states, including Meghalaya.

Kumar, S. In his work "Women in Indian Handloom Industry: Opportunities and Challenges, "shows a general discussion of the handloom industry in all regions of India with a special focus on the barriers to the entry of women entrepreneurs, particularly in the Northeast.

Misra, N. "Social Capital and Women Entrepreneurs in the Northeast: The Handloom

Sector" Discusses the relevance of social capital to women entrepreneurship, particularly in the rural regions.

Sarma, N. In his study on "Government Policies and Women's Entrepreneurship in Meghalaya's Handloom Industry, "examines the direct impact that government policies have on female entrepreneurs in the handloom and handicrafts industries in Meghalaya.

Mehta, R. in "Women Entrepreneurs and Market Access: The Handloom Sector in Meghalaya "looks into challenges and opportunities that women have towards accessing the domestic and international market in terms of supplying handloom products.

Khongwir, L. In his study on "Empowering Women through Sustainable Handicrafts: Case Study from Meghalaya," Focuses on the sustainability and eco-friendly nature of women handicraft businesses in Meghalaya and their contribution to the empowerment.

Barmukh, S.On "Financial Literacy and Women Entrepreneurs in Handicrafts" Discusses financial literacy significance for female entrepreneurs and how it affects their success in the handicrafts sector.

Hazarika, N. In his research on “Role of Digital Marketing for Women Entrepreneurs in the Handicrafts Industry" studied digital marketing utilization by female entrepreneurs in Meghalaya to promote their handicraft products.

Women's Empowerment highlights how economic activities undertaken by women lead to greater decision-making power, financial independence, and enhanced social status (Kabeer, 1999).

Entrepreneurship Development Theory emphasizes the role of small-scale entrepreneurship in generating employment and innovation in traditional industries (Schumpeter, 1934)

## Present Study

### Statement of the Problem

Although Meghalaya is culturally rich in handloom and handicrafts, the employment potential of the sector remains underexploited. Women entrepreneurs, who are central to these industries, often operate informally with minimal institutional support. The lack of market access, inadequate credit facilities, low adoption of modern techniques, and competition from mass-produced goods limit their ability to expand entrepreneurial ventures. Consequently, while the sector holds immense potential for employment generation, its actual impact remains restricted.

### Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

1. It explores an under-researched area in the context of Meghalaya, contributing to the literature on women's entrepreneurship in the North east.
2. It highlights the role of indigenous industries in generating employment and sustaining cultural heritage.
3. The study's findings will be useful for policymakers, NGOs, cooperatives, and women's self-help groups in designing strategies to strengthen entrepreneurship in handloom and handicrafts.
4. It contributes to broader debates on women's empowerment, rural development, and inclusive growth.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the employment potentiality of the handloom and handicrafts industry in East Khasi Hills district.
2. To examine the impact of the sector on women entrepreneurs in terms of income, empowerment, and socio-economic development.
3. To identify the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the industry.
4. To suggest policy measures and strategies to strengthen women's entrepreneurial participation and employment generation in the sector.

### Research Questions

1. What is the employment potential of the handloom and handicrafts industry in East Khasi Hills and Ri-bhoi districts?
2. How does the industry impact women entrepreneurs economically and socially?
3. What challenges constrain women entrepreneurs from realizing the full potential of this sector?
4. What measures can be undertaken to enhance the sector's role in employment generation and women's empowerment?

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study adopts a **mixed-methods research design**, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data will provide measurable insights into employment levels, income, and production, while qualitative data will capture lived experiences, challenges, and empowerment dimensions of women entrepreneurs.

## Area of Study

The research will be conducted in **East Khasi Hills and Ri-bhoi districts** of Meghalaya, known for its concentration of women artisans and entrepreneurs in weaving and handicrafts.

## Sample Design

**Population:** Women entrepreneurs engaged in handloom and handicrafts in East Khasi Hills district.

**Sample Size:** Approximately 120 respondents, selected through stratified random sampling to represent both urban (e.g., Shillong) and rural areas.

**Inclusion Criteria:** Women entrepreneurs above 18years, actively involved in handloom or handicrafts for at least three years.

## Data Collection

**Primary Data:** Structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with women entrepreneurs, cooperative leaders, and government officials.

**Secondary Data:** Reports from Ministry of Textiles, North Eastern Council, Meghalaya government, journal articles, books, and NGO reports.

## Tools of Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, frequency) to analyze demographic and economic data.

Inferential statistics (Chi-square test, correlation, regression analysis) to test relationships between variables (e.g., employment potential and income levels).

Thematic analysis for qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus groups.

## Ethical Considerations

Informed consent will be obtained from all respondents.

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be maintained.

Cultural sensitivity will be ensured while collecting data in local communities.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis will proceed in the following stages:

1. **Demographic Profile:** Age, education, marital status, family size, and years of entrepreneurial experience of women respondents.

2. **Employment Potential:** Analysis of how many women are self-employed, the number of additional employment opportunities created (assistants, apprentices), and the sector's contribution to household income.

3. **Economic Impact:** Income before and after engaging in handloom and handicrafts, savings, expenditure patterns, and access to credit.

4. **Empowerment Indicators:** Decision-making in households, mobility, participation in community organizations, and self-confidence levels.

5. **Challenges:** Identification of barriers such as lack of market access, irregular demand, inadequate financial support, raw material availability, and limited government assistance.

6. **Regression Analysis:** To assess the impact of entrepreneurship on household income and empowerment indicators.

7. **Qualitative Themes:** Narratives from women entrepreneurs regarding cultural pride, inter generational knowledge transfer, and aspirations for the future.

## Limitations

1. The study is confined to East Khasi Hills district and Ri-bhoi districts, limiting generalization to other regions of Meghalaya or Northeast India.

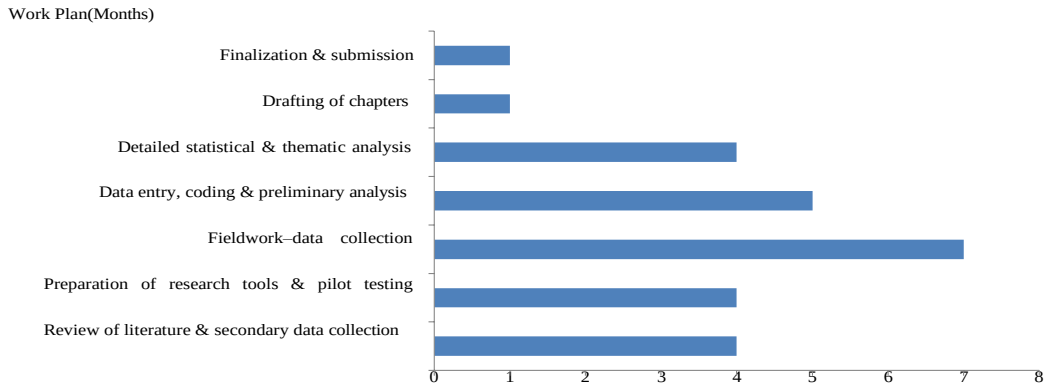
2. Time and resource constraints may limit the sample size.

3. Responses may be subject to recall bias or social desirability bias.(lack of education)

4. Seasonal fluctuations in production and sales may affect employment potential analysis.

# Work Plan of the Research

## Research Work Plan-Gantt Chart




Total Months: 26

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